Major General Martin E. Dempsey
Commanding General, 1st Armored Division in Iraq

Fires and Effects for the 1st Armored Division in Iraq

Interview by
Patrecia Slayden Hollis, Editor

Task Force 1st Armored Division was the largest division-based task force in US Army history and was deployed the longest since World War II, nearly 15 months. The task force had 36,000 Soldiers and 14 brigade headquarters. Each brigade had a combination of mortars and artillery that fired counterfire and harassment and interdiction fires.

Task Force 1st Armored Division was deployed to Iraq from May 2003 until arriving back in Germany in August 2004, spending the first 12 months rebuilding Baghdad. Then for Operation Iron Sabre, the task force moved south for three months to defeat an uprising of Muqtada al Sadr's radical militia and insurgents who were attacking supply routes and controlling a number of cities in an area of operations that spanned more than 20,000 square kilometers, including the cities of Najaf, Karbala, Kut, Mahmudiah and Iskandaria. Within 15 days, supply lines were reopened; within 30 days, those attacking the supply lines were on the run; and within 60 days, the militia was defeated.

Q *While the 1st Armored Division was in Iraq, what were the division's greatest successes?*

A We had successes at all levels. Every Soldier saw himself as a warrior and embraced the Chief of Staff of the Army's Warrior Ethos. We were able to conduct some training while in contact with the enemy to ensure Soldiers received the right skill sets for fighting the insurgency.

In an environment where precision effects, as opposed to massed fires, were key, our artillery organizations and Soldiers were able to adapt as much or more than any Soldiers in theater—

quite an accomplishment.

But our biggest success was in adapting our technologically heavy division intelligence system to absorb human intelligence. About 80 percent of our intelligence, our actionable intelligence, came from human sources with 20 percent from technology. At the organizational level, that was a great success.

Then, at the upper level where the division connected into the operational level, our greatest success was in balancing kinetic energy with other less lethal effects to develop the synergy to move Iraq toward stability.

So, our JFEC [joint fires and effects cell] migrated from focusing on deep attack and kinetic energy to focusing more on other tools, to include the economic development of Iraq, information operations, engagement activities, meetings with tribal leaders and so forth. As our JFEC focused on those less lethal tools, we became better at influencing the populace—a necessity in this kind of warfare.

Q *What were your greatest challenges?*

A Making those adaptations. When you go to the combat training centers in peacetime, the mantra is that you have to see yourself, see the terrain and see the enemy. In a high-intensity fight, your greatest challenge is to see the enemy because you know about yourself; once you know about the enemy, you can react to him.

When fighting insurgents, the biggest challenge is seeing yourself. You have to understand what you are about and then adjust your methodologies and the application of your tools.

Case in point: when we arrived in Iraq, we initially conducted a lot of cordons and searches, traffic control points, sweeps, presence patrols—we were almost ubiquitous. That was in June 2003 right after all the grotesque looting had occurred. Our mission was to stabilize the environment.

I think history will say that we did that, that we tamped down the lawlessness, which is really what it was. But in doing so, we were a bit imprecise, which caused us problems later. So in that environment, we had to see ourselves—what we were doing and what the intended outcome was, which was different than what we initially thought.

Now let's "fast forward" to Operation Iron Sabre in April 2004 when we had to deal with the radical militia of Muqtada al Sadr in the south. First, I would suggest that what we did in April 2004 we could not have done in June 2003. It was true that by April we had grown as an organization and as leaders and had become battle-hardened, but by then we also understood how all things fit together in that culture and could "see" our part in it. So we took a

deliberate approach—very patient, very precise and open to Iraqi solutions. We wanted to be seen as taking into account all the different elements of power and applying them. That sent the right messages to the Iraqi people and the world.

At the tactical level, the individual Soldier level, we wanted to be seen as relentless and aggressive. Now, you might ask, "How do you reconcile deliberate, patient and precise with aggressive and relentless?" That's the art of warfare.

During Operation Iron Sabre, we had five cities to stabilize. We made the conscious decision to work them sequentially, not simultaneously. This allowed us to intervene with local authorities, religious leaders and political leaders—to paint the picture that, eventually, we're coming to "your" city. It's "your" option to fix the problems "yourself" because, eventually, we're going to make our way over there. That was pretty successful, actually.

In terms of precision, at no time did we work our way through a city building by building or room by room. We gathered intelligence on where the pockets of radical militia were and then either stood off and attacked the pockets with precision munitions or penetrated them. But if we did go in on the ground, we penetrated, attacked the militia and then moved back out to minimize the risk of being seen as creating excessive collateral damage or prolonging suffering needlessly.

During Iron Sabre, we established a time threshold, meaning that we understood the 21st century reality—that the operation had a "shelf life" as related to how the American people and international community perceived the operation through the media. You can't get into a fight that takes a long time in this environment. You could if you were fighting the Republican Guards, but not if you're working your way through the Iraqi population.

We did not conduct MOUT [military operations in urban terrain] or combat in cities in the traditional sense; we more accurately conducted "combat among populations." To do that, we sorted through the intelligence and applied combat power with precision only where necessary.

For example, in Najaf in May 2004, we encountered six 120-mm mortar shooters. By analyzing our intelligence, we verifiably killed five of them. We could not have done that in June 2003.

- Remain on the offensive.
- Balance kinetic and information operations (IO).
- Ensure boundaries do not become barriers.
- Understand that relationships are more important than rewards.
- In combat, lead from the front; in civil affairs, lead from behind.
- Gain contact, maintain contact and finish the fight.
- Maintain precision in all things but especially in language.
- Manage expectations–of Soldiers, Iraqis and families at home.
- Continue to train and develop leaders.

Tenets of Combat Operations in Populations

And then as a parallel line of operation, we worked to build confidence among local leaders, inject money into the economy, rebuild police stations and rebuild the Iraqi security forces, giving them more armament to put them on equal footing with the insurgents.

Using that strategy, we went from Kut to Diwaniyeh to Karbala and back down to Najaf and stabilized all of them. It worked.

Q *What did you learn in "combat among populations"?*

A We learned so much that if you listed the lessons in bullet format, they would fill up one of your magazines.

One of the most significant lessons was the importance of precision in all things—in intelligence, munitions and especially in the language describing what you are doing. For example, we didn't send Soldiers out on "presence" patrols; we sent them on "reconnaissance" patrols.

We learned to consciously balance our use of our high-end combat capabilities with other tools. Often, we established a theme for a particular period of time, especially in Baghdad. We decided, for example, what we wanted the people of Baghdad to feel about Baghdad in about 90 days—it takes that long to turn public perception in a big city. Baghdad is a city of six million people compressed into an area about the size of Detroit. Traditionally, we plan military operations and then somebody turns to one of the staff officers and said, "Ah geeze, we need an information operations annex. Write one up, and we'll stick it in the operations order." But the annex really had no bearing on the intended results.

While in Iraq, we often determined our theme and devised the information operations plan to support it and, last, built our combat operations to support that theme. We reversed the paradigm. We still had to be able to apply that blunt instrument called combat power, but we had to apply it to gain the "prize"—inspiring public confidence and moving the Iraqi people toward democracy.

These probably are the biggest lessons learned, but I've got about nine that I've briefed in several forums. [See the figure.]

Q *How important are precision fires in that environment?*

A Absolutely crucial. In general, we learned the more precise we could be, the better off we were. You must take into account the potential consequences of your actions.

Precision is a tool, not the "silver bullet." There were times when we were consciously *imprecise*. Case in point: early on in our deployment, we cordoned and searched the Adamia area of Baghdad—imprecise operations consciously applied.

You can choose to be imprecise, but you better have the ability to be precise too.

Q *What indirect fires did you employ in the southern region of Iraq during Operation Iron Sabre?*

A The simple answer is we used everything we had: mortars, 105-mm towed and 155-mm Paladin howitzers, Apache attack helicopters, the Air Force's AC-130 gunships (with great effect) and Predator UAVs [unmanned aerial vehicles] armed with Hellfire missiles.

On occasion, we employed F-16 fighter aircraft with ISR [intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance] pods. We dropped a few JDAMs [joint direct

attack munitions], but that's a munition you have to be careful with in an urban environment.

Each of our FOBs [forward operating bases] had a "Hot" section or platoon of artillery ready to provide immediate counterfire. Our FOBs took a lot of enemy rocket and mortar fires.

In Baghdad, we had about 22 FOBs; when we went south, we consolidated into nine FOBs. During the fight against Sadr's radical militia, one of the base camps in Najaf took as many as 50 rounds of mortar fire per day from rooftops, alleyways and the back of pickup trucks.

We had a very carefully constructed and robust suite of counterfire radars that we built and rebuilt into different architectures as we learned more about the enemy's capabilities: Q-36 and Q-37 Firefinders and, during Operation Iron Sabre, LCMRs [lightweight countermortar radars]. We also had OH-58-D Kiowa Warrior helicopters that provided overhead surveillance.

Q *While fighting the radical militia in the south, did you ever have complete situational awareness?*

A Absolutely not—there's no such thing in this region of the world. It's a question of culture.

I lived in Saudi Arabia for two years before deploying with the division to Baghdad for a third year. During that time, I gained an appreciation for the *tapestry* of that society. The tapestry is interwoven with tribal, deep religious and economic relationships with some emerging political aspirations.

So, when you ask someone like me—an Irish Catholic from Bayonne, New Jersey—"Did you ever have complete situational awareness in Baghdad or anywhere else in the Middle East?" the answer is, "Absolutely not." And we never will understand the degree to which their influences intermingle in their culture as compared to ours.

Case in point: In America, religion is an important part of life. In the Middle East, for many, religion *is* life. So the imam from the mosque or minaret with a microphone has far greater impact on them than an American cleric with a microphone would have on us.

Another case: The status of tribal elders or leaders. Once in Saudi Arabia I was in a room of about 300 tribal leaders, sitting on a horseshoe-shaped bunch of couches. Every time someone new walked in, everyone stood up and kissed the new leader and then sat back down, but never in the same place, unless you were one of the top guys. Everyone knew exactly where to sit and exactly where they were in the "pecking order."

Complete situational awareness in the Middle East is not an achievable goal.

Q *How does that affect targeting and precise operation?*

A It requires redundancy in intel. Through intelligence analysis, you determine patterns that over time lead you to conclusions, as opposed to taking disparate sound bytes and trying to piece them together.

In a high-intensity fight, you would see an enemy force moving across the border "here" and then three hours later see a force moving "there" and have confidence that it was the same force—it just had moved.

If you make assumptions based on the same level of "intelligence bytes" in Iraq, you may be seeing two different tribes and two different religious organizations and make more enemies with your actions against them. Counterinsurgency requires a far greater degree of analysis—it is truly a fight for intelligence as much as anything else in Iraq.

Q *What other indirect fire assets would you like to have had organic to your division to mitigate your lack of 100 percent situational awareness?*

A More radars. Over time, we got very good at pattern analysis and very effective with counterfire. We got good at orienting the radars, overlapping their coverage and augmenting them with ground scouts and overhead platforms for reconnaissance and surveillance. We linked all that info back to the Hot guns via ADOCS [automated deep operations coordination system]. Before we redeployed, we had counterfire very, very quickly. Although we did not reach the goal of counterfire in less than one minute, we came close.

Now, we do need to improve our Firefinder radars. For example, the Q-37 is designed to counter a rocket attack. It uses fairly old technology intended to pick up mass barrages of rockets fired in the old Soviet methodology. So the radar has difficulty detecting insurgents firing a single 80-mm or 120-mm rocket off a rain gutter or propped up against an irrigation ditch. My point is, we need to upgrade the radars' technology to make them more precise for use in the Global War on Terror. We also need to increase the range and accuracy of the LCMR, which I understand the FA is working with the LCMR Program Manager to attain.

I'd like more UAVs, an important part of our fight. In one case, a UAV picked up the enemy loading a 120-mm mortar and ammo into a vehicle, followed the enemy to a house, and watched as the enemy emplaced the mortar on the roof of the house. A second UAV, a Predator armed with Hellfire, engaged and destroyed the mortar. These UAVs worked very well in tandem.

So these kinds of systems are critical in an

Photo by R. D. Ward

Major General Dempsey leads the division in a pass-in-review during homecoming ceremonies in Weisbaden, Germany, on 7 October 2004.

urban environment where the fight is vertical more than horizontal.

Now having said all that, when we moved south to quell the radical militia, we were the main effort and well resourced. Although they were not organic, we had more radars and UAVs.

Q *At what level did you integrate your ETACs [Air Force enlisted terminal attack controllers]? Could you have used more?*

A They started at the brigade TOC [tactical operations center], but we shifted them around, based on the missions. The brigade commanders decided where to place them on the battlefield. In some cases, the ETACs were with the company or troop commanders.

It really depended on what kind of aircraft we were getting. The AC-130 pilot has different requirements for clearing fires. He doesn't necessarily need to talk to an ETAC who has eyes on target—the AC-130 pilot is going to have eyes on that target—he can talk to a ground commander.

But the F-16 pilot flying much higher has different requirements—he has to talk to a certified ETAC.

Our ETACs were very effective. We had fairly predictable air assets for our environment, so we could move the ETACs around as we needed them.

But I would have liked to have had redundancy in ETACs. When you have a 20,000-square-kilometer battlespace with five cities to stabilize that are from 100 to 150 kilometers away from each other, you always run some risks moving ETACs around.

I think the future suggests that we need more ETACs—and, in addition to redundancy, I am a big believer in habitual relationships—routinely training and working together.

The Chief of Staff of the Army's goal is to be joint interdependent, not just interoperable. Our 13 Foxes [13F Fire Support Specialists], who are the Army's forward observers for indirect fires, make a logical choice for JTACs [joint TACs], increasing the ground force's capability to terminally control air attacks and increasing joint interdependence.

I understand that some 13 Foxes are training to qualify as JTACs—a great initiative.

Photo by SFC Alexander Rucker, 982d Signal Company

Soldiers of A Battery, 1st Battalion, 94th Field Artillery, 1st Armored Division, conduct a night patrol in Baghdad on 3 February 2004.

Q *For the close fight, we're developing a 155-mm Excalibur precision-guided unitary round with a range out to about 40 kilometers and an accuracy of 10 meters or less at all ranges, a round that is optimized for use in urban and complex terrain. Would that round have been useful to you in Iraq?*

A Absolutely—it's right on the mark. It does not produce duds, and it's precise, making it very useful for combat operations in populations.

Many of our fights had a certain flow to them. Two RPG [rocket propelled-grenade] shooters would be on a rooftop with two snipers with AK-47s and then a little farther down the street and in an alleyway would be another RPG shooter with a sniper in a window just a little farther. In this scenario, we were using a tank's main gun with a 120-mm heat round in the direct fire mode instead of the .50-cal machine gun to take out the window sniper; the .50-cal travels farther and penetrates more of the poorly constructed buildings, potentially creating more collateral damage. I also used Apaches firing Hellfire missiles to counter that threat.

But if I had had Excalibur unitary, I could have fired from kilometers away with a 10-meter circular error probable [CEP], that would have been *huge*—I could have used it for rooftops. Most of the bad things that happen to you in a city happen to you from a rooftop.

With some practice, I probably could have dropped it into the front door of a building.

Q *We're in operational testing of a long-range 15- to 70-kilometer precision-guided MLRS [multiple-launch rocket system] unitary rocket that you can employ close to friendlies with confidence that is optimized for urban and complex terrain. Could you have used this rocket in Iraq?*

A Oh, Lord, *yes.* In Baghdad, the enemy did too much damage with his SS-30 Brazilian-made 127-mm rocket launcher that has a range of 30 kilometers. Thirty kilometers exceeds Paladin's range. We generally had to fight the threat with either rotary- or fixed-wing aircraft or UAVs. I am not convinced we were very effective against the 127-mm rocket launchers.

If I could have shot MLRS at these rocket launchers with no submunition problems, we'd have been far more likely to get a kill.

The MLRS unitary rocket will give us the advantage.

Q *You deployed to Iraq with your Div Arty [division artillery] serving as a maneuver brigade combat team while also serving as your force FA headquarters. How important is it to have a force FA headquarters and why?*

A Very important. The counterfire fight requires the expertise of the senior artilleryman in a force FA headquarters. I needed advice on indirect fire issues; I needed the division FSE [fire support element]; and I needed Chief [131A Targeting Warrant Officer] to tell me how to overlap and focus our radars. I cleared fires in Baghdad with my FSCOORD [fire support coordinator] as my executive agent for clearing fires.

When we moved south for Operation Iron Sabre, I delegated the authority to clear fires in such a large battlespace down to five commanders, mostly lieu-

tenant colonels. But before I did, my targeting officer with a team of experts trained the five in clearance of fires and counterfire procedures.

The force FA headquarters gave me the assets and expertise I needed to adapt to the situation.

Q *What unique missions did you give Field Artillerymen, and how did they perform?*

A You already mentioned I gave the Div Arty commander double duty as force FA commander and maneuver brigade commander responsible for his own segment of Baghdad.

The DS [direct support] FA battalion commanders each had a neighborhood or multiple neighborhoods in Baghdad and were expected to establish a safe and secure environment the same as their infantry or armored battalion counterparts. They had cross-attached maneuver and other forces under their command, whatever the mission called for.

They initiated civil projects and monitored them, they did governance work, established neighborhood councils, met with local tribal sheiks and political and religious leaders, and ran their own FOBs They conducted reconnaissance missions, raids, cordons and searches, and cordons and attacks.

Simply stated, these Field Artillerymen performed the same jobs as well as their fellow combat arms officers who wore Armor or Infantry brass.

Q *As the Army's integrator of Joint Fires and Effects, the Field Artillery is transitioning to JFECs. How important is the JFEC for the UEx commander on today's battlefield and why?*

A Its importance depends on the environment—the UEx commander must have the ability to conduct deliberate military decision making in high-intensity conflict, in which case the JFEC remains important as the integrator of all lethal and less lethal fires and effects for the division.

But in a counterinsurgency environment, the JFEC is the catalyst for everything the division does.

In 15 months in Iraq, we wrote 12 operations orders. Contrast that with my targeting meetings with the JFEC every 48 hours and my once-a-week targeting briefings while in Baghdad—about 80 meetings. Just running the numbers, which one do you think is more important?

Q *At the 11th hour, the Army extended your division's tour in Iraq from 12 to nearly 15 months. Why?*

A In April in an uprising in the south, the radical militia took over the governments of five cities. The declaration of sovereignty while part of the country was under insurgent control would have made it a document with no real meaning. So, we had to defeat the insurgents. The seasoned 1st Armored Division was the logical force for the mission.

The Iron Soldiers reacted to their sudden extension in Iraq as professionally as any group of Soldiers I've ever been around. They took it like a blow to the stomach knocking the wind out of them temporarily, but very temporarily.

One of the realities of the 21st century is that your families kind of go to war with you. It was common for Soldiers to email their families 30 minutes before or after a patrol, checking in with them. With families so involved, leaders have to manage their expectations and keep them informed in a way that we never had to before.

When the division got extended, we sent one of the ADCs [assistant division commanders] back to Germany to meet with the family members at each of our nine kasernes and explain the reason for the extension. The families not only took the extension well, but they also encouraged and empowered their Soldiers to accomplish the mission. It was great.

At the end of the day, what got us through those 15 months, including 130 Soldiers killed and 798 Purple Hearts, was focusing on communications and being absolutely honest about what was going on and why.

Q *What message would you like to send Army and Marine Field Artillerymen, either fighting in GWOT or getting ready to?*

A We are winning in Iraq. Without the Coalition Force moving Iraq toward democracy, that part of the world likely would have become a sanctuary and crucible for terrorism for the next century. For the good of the 21st century and the Western world and its eventual reconciliation with those in the Middle East, we absolutely are doing the right thing.

The most powerful influence in that region right now is American Soldiers and Marines. You are black, white, males, females, Christians, Muslims or Jews, all working together as a team—there is no other example of such diversity in that part of the world.

Our nation's at war—for the most part, a ground war—and you Soldiers and Marines are the ones fighting it. Thank you for your service.

I also compliment you on your adaptability. In this environment, you Field Artillery Soldiers and Marines have had to adapt the most and have been most successful at it.

And finally, you must maintain your ability to provide full-spectrum fires and effects whenever the ground force needs them, including massed fires and precision lethality. We are counting on you as the King of Battle.

Major General Martin E. Dempsey is the Commanding General of the 1st Armored Division in Germany and deployed the division to Operation Iraqi Freedom II from June 2003 until August 2004. In his previous assignment, he was the Program Manager for Saudi Arabian National Guard Modernization in Saudi Arabia for two years. On the Joint Staff at the Pentagon, he was the Special Assistant to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Assistant Deputy Director for Politico-Military Affairs, Europe and Africa (J5). He commanded the 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment at Fort Carson, Colorado, and the 5th Battalion, 67th Armor, 1st Armored Division in Germany. He Also served as the Chief of Armor Branch, Officer Personnel Management Directorate, Total Army Personnel Command in Alexandria, Virginia. During Operations Desert Shield and Storm he was the S3 of 3d Brigade, 3d Armored Division in the Gulf. He holds master's degrees in National Security and Strategic Studies from the National War College in Washington, DC; in English from Duke University, North Carolina; and in Military Arts and Sciences from the Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.